DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 422 884 IR 019 025

AUTHOR	Wilka, Kathy; Fitzner, Sue
TITLE	Distance Education "Lifeguards": Saving Students from Traditional Waters.
PUB DATE	1998-00-00
NOTE	7p.; In: Distance Learning '98. Proceedings of the Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning (14th, Madison, WI, August 5-7, 1998); see IR 018 976.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Advising; Access to Education; *Computer Uses in Education; Continuing Education; *Distance Education; Graduate Study; Higher Education; Internet; *Library Education; Library Schools; Marketing; Masters Programs; Residence Requirements; School Guidance; School Registration; Technological Literacy; *Telecommunications
IDENTIFIERS	*Technology Integration; University of Arizona

ABSTRACT

This paper describes how the University of Arizona (UA) School of Information Resources and Library Science (IRLS) distance Master of Arts program works with policies and procedures written for traditional programs with different needs and objectives. Challenges discussed include: (1) registration, including using the university's automated telephone system, securing e-mail accounts, accessing UA systems, and getting grades and transcripts in a timely manner; (2) marketing, including advertising by predominantly electronic means, including lists, search engines, postings, word of mouth, and a World Wide Web site; (3) communication, including communicating via general lists, class lists, and the website, maintaining syllabi online in order to advertise course content and program offerings, and facilitating e-mail and systems access; (4) technology requirements, including determining students technological prowess, orientation, and the online IRLS Resource Guide; (5) advising, including making distance students feel connected with the institution using live-time interaction such as scheduled chat sessions and virtual office hours, along with e-mail and list communication; (6) residency, including enabling students to meet residency requirements during intensive summer and winter sessions, other flexible options, and encouraging higher administration to review the residency policy for master's level students; and (7) future plans, including awareness of the potential for growth in this area. (DLS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

Distance Education "Lifeguards": Saving Students From Traditional Waters

Kathy Wilka, Program Coordinator
School of Information Resources and Library Science
The University of Arizona

Sue Fitzner, Program Specialist
School of Information Resources and Library Science
The University of Arizona

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
C.H. Olgren
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 422 884

Introduction

The University of Arizona (UA), School of Information Resources and Library Science (IRLS) is at the forefront of distance education providing students in all geographic locations an opportunity to earn their Master of Arts degree in IRLS. To obtain courses virtually, students must have graphical web access and meet certain computer requirements. Both resident and non-resident students participate in course work distributed over the Internet and utilize a combination of tools including World Wide Web (WWW), e-mail, conferencing network, newsgroups, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and other environments. Planning is critical to the long term success or failure of any program. The Upper Administration of an institution often establishes policy and procedure, but the support and implementation of that program is in the hands of departmental staff. The traditional structure and organization of many higher education institutions is often unyielding and unwieldy, thereby making the job of the implementers frustrating, however; this process can drive creativity and aid in the success of a program.

Discussion

Some universities and institutions of higher learning have specific units or departments that control the logistics of courses taught at times other than during the day, or taught by methods other than in the classroom. These units are called Extension Programs, Continuing Education Programs, Continuing Adult Education, etc. in most instances. These units tend to house programs offered by the university for the community at large, more non-traditional courses in technology, self-improvement and the like. They also assist academic departments by aiding students with registration, advising, and guidance. In the case of the UA, this entity is called the Extended University (EU). Any course not offered in the traditional manner is offered through EU. EU is then responsible for registration, collecting payment, and payment of instructors. There are no traditional UA academic units offering course work completely over the Internet, at this time, other than IRLS. Portions of some classes (i.e.: exercises, quizzes, homework) are supplemented via this medium. The UA Administration hasn't yet made university-wide arrangements or means for the option of offering course work in a completely virtual environment. Because IRLS has already taken this step, the program must work with policies and procedures written for programs with different needs and objectives.

IR019025

Registration

Significant challenges come to light when trying to utilize a structure developed for programs with different needs and objectives. For instance, traditional students register for classes via an automated telephone system. This process is immediate and very accurate. Should there be a problem with the student's record, the system will alert the student and the student can walk to the Registrar's Office to clear things up in person. Initially, IRLS utilized the registration process offered by EU. This is a manual process, and so many different offices are involved besides IRLS and EU, that the process was not satisfactory to the needs of our students. Students were registered late or sometimes not at all.

Additional problems arose regarding securing email accounts for these students, allowing them access to the UA systems, and getting grades and transcripts completed in a timely manner. Most of these problems were due to an initial oversight in the student's overall admission to the program. Through several meetings and working closely with EU, IRLS was able to enable students to register via the automated telephone system, rather than over the telephone through a representative of Extended University. IRLS classes are not registered in the "Distance Learning" program any more, but rather through "Evening and Weekend (EW) Campus" program. This way, the student can register via the automated phone system and any errors with the record are caught by the system. The student's registration is checked by the system, and if there is a problem, an automated voice comes on and asks them to contact the department. IRLS staff is then able to act as liaison for the student and assist with correcting any problems. This process ensures timely registration for the student, access to email accounts, and other amenities offered to traditional students on campus. The program isn't really EW program, but is utilized to care for IRLS registration needs. This is an example of utilizing a system not designed for distance education purposes.

Marketing

A virtually based program seeks and attracts both traditional and nontraditional students who are looking to further their education in an environment which will allow them to realize several personal goals. Some of these goals might be: to remain at home, to keep a current position of employment, and/or to study and participate in the course at one's convenience. At the same time, the student wants a rigorous learning experience provided to them. Our program supports students who otherwise would not be able to complete a program due to their personal circumstances or the prohibitive distance to a quality program. We offer course work online via the Internet, thereby making it available to anyone meeting the admissions and technology criteria established by our program, regardless of geographic location.

Advertising of our degree and course work is accomplished by predominately electronic means. Our discipline fosters a close relationship between information science, information seeking behaviors and library science. As the Internet becomes a larger part of the information network for all levels of education, it is important that a program be visible, easy to locate during online searching, and provides answers and information for prospective students. We promote the School through several different means: lists, Internet search engines, postings, word of mouth, and our alumni. However the students our program attracts usually find us online, so the best place to market our program is

electronically over the Internet. The main form of advertisement is via the World Wide Web (WWW). The IRLS works diligently to keep its website (see http://www.sir.arizona.edu) current and active. New information or changes in program policy and procedure are posted immediately and marked up to the website. Application information is collected and analyzed on a monthly basis to see how prospective students hear about the program. Most of our inquiries come to us via the WWW and electronic lists and publications.

Communication

IRLS communicates with distance and resident students electronically via a general list, class lists, and the web site. All changes in policy and procedure pertaining to the program are announced to the general school list. Students are responsible for information posted here just like they would be if it were mailed to them in the US mail. This list provides a means of tracking students' email addresses, as staff is able to request a list of all subscribers. It is important to keep lines of communication open and to keep the student body well informed regarding issues, which will affect their degree.

Syllabi are included on the IRLS site and provide students with communication for classes. Class lectures for our virtual offerings are also linked here. The faculty incorporate several different links to web based information regarding UA policy, library online sources and courses readings. These links to other sources allow faculty to provide students access to materials and information for class and projects without having to have class notes and textbooks shipped to them, thus cutting down on expenses for the student. The syllabus is a live document and faculty can make additions and corrections or changes to the document at any time during the semester, without having to make a new copy for every student in the class.

By having the syllabi online, prospective students can see what IRLS has to offer prior to requesting an application. An archive of the syllabi is available, allowing readers to follow the history and evolution of the program. The department is able to save postage by pointing prospective applicants to the web site for comprehensive information concerning course content and program offerings. It is a future goal of the program to have the entire application package available as a downloadable file.

The website and the list are used as a means of relaying information, policy and procedures to students. The School utilizes electronic lists in place of memorandums and letters. In the beginning of each semester, every course establishes a class list. These lists are used for facilitation of class discussion, announcements and reminders. The School also has a general list that promotes intellectual and social discussion amongst the students. Topics of discussion range from copyright issues, intellectual property and censorship issues to looking for roommates, childcare facilities and social arrangements. All students in the program are required to subscribe as soon as they are admitted to the program, and applicants to the program are encouraged to subscribe as a means of "getting a feel" for how the program runs. Information from this list is archived on the University's main computer and is also set up as a newsreader. There are several ways to access pertinent information regarding the School, all gaps are filled and information available electronically. Students find the information available in several formats.

The School has worked continuously and persistently with the Center for Computing and Information Technology (CCIT) in rectifying several problems. Initially, students in our program were unable to sign up for University of Arizona email accounts. As paying students in our program, this is something they were entitled to have. Much information students needed to access was unavailable to them, unless the account from which the request came was a University of Arizona domain. Initially, none of the distance students were able to access information from the library, a tragedy for our program. To rectify this, the School sent lists of names and social security numbers for all our off campus students to a particular office and the accounts were added manually. This would take up to three and four weeks from the beginning of the semester, and students would not be able to access information they needed, hence falling behind in the class. Those students on campus were able to retrieve the information needed, an unfair advantage. The School then set up it's own server and gave students access to it as a means of signing up for email accounts via a UA domain. Finally, we were able to convince the University to establish a security system that allows our students to sign up for a UA email account from any domain. A student can access his local service provider and Telnet into the University system without being charged a long distance call. The development of this procedure took four semesters.

Technology Requirements

Due to the evolution of technology as it relates to computers, access, and the Internet, planning is a constant challenge and requires evaluation of the administrative policies and procedures guiding the program from semester to semester. Staff takes into consideration technology and software advancements as they relate directly to the students and their learning environment and thus free up the faculty, allowing them to focus their efforts on the intellectual content and mentoring of the students in the program. Students need to be able to evolve with the advancing technology and also the curriculum as they advance through the program. Development of an online resource guide has been instrumental in guiding both applicants and new students through the technological web of terms, applications, and electronic and campus resources. It also provides them some of the basic but necessary tools, which will lead to success in the program.

The School is very clear in all published information pertaining to the requirements for admission to the program technologically as well as academically. However we presently have no means of testing the technological prowess of the students who apply to the program, we have to rely on them providing us an accurate self-assessment. We do require each applicant to submit a letter of introduction, part of which must address computer skills. If the student does not meet these requirements, but is otherwise admissible and a strong candidate, provisions must be made for support and assistance. Support is offered to on campus students in a two-day orientation session, prior to the commencement of the semester. The session covers several topical areas with which the student needs to be competent to perform well in the program. These include Email, overview of IRLS Web Site Resource, Survival Tips in the Library, Searching the Internet and Evaluation of Websites, FTP Instruction, HTML Instruction, and information pertaining to internships, job opportunities, and fellowships. The School's staff is currently working on developing an online orientation for first time virtual students. As a rule, virtual students are much more adept technologically than are those students on campus. Nevertheless; the School would still like to present some sort of introduction to the program for the virtual students. As a first step, staff created the IRLS Resource Guide

(http://www.sir.arizona.edu/school/resource.html), also referred to the Electronic Life Preserver. Both applicants and newly admitted students are encouraged to read through and utilize this guide as a tutorial. In time, a more comprehensive plan will be developed and mounted on the web site.

Advising

Advising students not on campus can present many interesting challenges. One of them is making the student feel connected with the institution. The School uses several methods to accomplish this. For instance, during the spring semester, the students as a whole felt they should foster a sense of camaraderie and share ideas between themselves. Traditionally, interaction of this type would occur immediately following class, or at a particular time afterwards having coffee together or meeting for lunch. This is not a possibility with our virtual contingency. With the help of the staff this current semester, a "virtual happy hour" was established for the School. General topics discussed have been copyright issues, intellectual property, curriculum issues, internship opportunities, and other areas related to the discipline. The topics are not limited or selected by the faculty, rather the students among themselves decide the topic of discussion. This method of communication is also used one on one for advising students in the field. Staff and faculty can set office hours virtually or schedule to meet with students as an appointment. The live time interaction proves most beneficial in making students feel more a part of the program. The School also utilizes email and list communication.

Residency

In offering a virtual program, the question of residency usually arises. The School has found this obstacle to be one of the most insurmountable for prospective students. At this time, there is no program in Information Science or Library Science, which offers a completely virtual degree. Every program has a residency requirement. Some programs require the student to spend a portion of each semester on campus, some programs require an entire semester on campus, other programs require students to fulfill the requirement by a combination of means. We have structured this program to be as flexible as possible within the requirement of twelve units in residence. To try and ease the financial burden on the student, the School offers a full semester's worth of courses in the summer which includes a three week pre-session and two five week sessions. Students can attend courses for resident tuition during the summer months. Students can complete all or part of the residency requirement during this time. Classes are offered during the fall and spring semester one night a week for the full semester. Virtual students living within about a one hundred-mile radius make the drive to campus one night a week for fifteen weeks. A short course is offered during a one-week winter session. Students can complete three units of residency during this week. The progression through the degree must be completed within six years. Students use many combinations of the above to complete this requirement. At times, however; this requirement prohibits otherwise very qualified students from making application. The School has been encouraging the higher administration to review the residency policy for the master's level of education. Is it necessary that students actually spend time on campus at the master's level?

Future Plans

The future of education is changing rapidly. More and more universities and institutes of higher learning are researching the different means by which education can be offered. With the explosive growth of the Internet and the various ways this medium can be used to facilitate learning, it's only a matter of time before more and more students are able to gain an education via this mode. It is important for university administrations to be aware of the potential for growth in this area.

Autobiographical Sketches

Sue Fitzner has over ten years experience in higher education. She brings considerable experience in management, distance education administration and Internet teaching. She has been a consultant, administrator, on-line instructor and classroom instructor. She has served as a teacher of training sessions for IBM executives and developed Internet training modules for K–12 teachers.

Address: School of Information Resources and Library Science
The University of Arizona
1515 E. First St.
Tucson, AZ 85719
Email: sfitzner@u.arizona.edu
URL: http://www.sir.arizona.edu
Phone: (520) 621-3565
Fax: (520) 621-3279

Kathy Wilka has worked in higher education for over ten years. She earned her master's degree in education through a distance program with Northern Arizona University, giving her a unique perspective of the problems and struggles of the distance student. She advises both prospective and current students regarding program policy and interpretation, providing a vital link for students not on campus.

Address: School of Information Resources and Library Science
The University of Arizona
1515 E. First St.
Tucson, AZ 85719
Email: wilka@u.arizona.edu
URL: http://www.sir.arizona.edu
Phone: (520) 621-3565
Fax: (520) 621-3279